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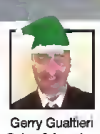
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Mayor White's Message

Warm Yuletide Wishes

Dear Neighbours,



On Saturday November 17, 2012 the Christmas Holiday Season officially got under way here in Bradford West Gwillimbury.

Thousands of our residents and visitors gathered along Holland Street for our Annual Santa Claus Parade. Representation of local businesses, sports teams, service clubs and church groups marched in yet another successful parade. Everyone rallied together to celebrate the coming of the holidays and unite as a vibrant and proud community.

Congratulations to the Santa Claus Parade Committee, the dozens of volunteers, the South Simcoe Police Services and BWG Town staff who worked diligently to make this parade a huge success. Kudos to all of the participants for the countless hours you spent decorating your festive floats. As a community, we are proud of your efforts.

Please join us for "Family First Night" on December 31st at the BWG Leisure Centre for a fun filled event to celebrate and ring in the New Year.

Wishing everyone a safe and Happy Holiday Season!

Doug White

Mayor

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'Tis the season to be jolly... and healthy!



For many of us, this time of year brings more than a change of weather. We spend a hectic couple of months, heading from party to party, roaming shops in search of the perfect gift, and spending quality time with family and friends. While we find ourselves in the midst of the most Festive season of the year, the last thing on our minds is making healthy choices.

Here are a couple of tips to help you stay balanced this year, through all the holiday cheer:

Food choices - choose your battles! Don't be too hard on yourself this year, but remember that you can avoid the guilt by making good choices. Prepare and plan ahead of time, and opt for whole foods instead of something from a box. Enjoy a glass of wine or two? Just remember, the liquid calories from alcohol don't offer your body any nutrients. If you plan to indulge in a glass or two - skip the dessert!

Get moving! Feeling Scrooge-like? Staying active helps offset the calories you're taking in, and will leave you feeling less stressed, and more content. Set aside some time to go for a brisk walk or catch a yoga class. Aim to sweat about 30 minutes a day.

Remember to breathe! Too often we feel a sense of obligation to everyone but ourselves. Make the commitment each day to ground yourself. Meditate, breathe deeply, or simply sit in silence. It's important to remember that we can't share peace with our communities, until we find it within ourselves. We deserve it!

- Sandy Maisine
GLOyoga, Bradford

Winter tires win the debate

The great debate continues to rage: Snow tires, or All Season radials, for winter driving?

While some swear they manage just fine with good quality All Seasons, the fact remains that winter tires have been proven to provide improved traction for starting, cornering – and stopping.

Winter tires are made of a softer rubber compound than All Seasons, which become hard and more slippery as the temperature plummets. Winter Tires remain supple, and contain compounds that actually stick to the surface of ice or snow, maximizing traction and grip.

The experts point out that installing Winter Tires will extend the life your All Seasons, since they'll be packed away at least 4 or 5 months of the year.

And they recommend that you install 4 Winter Tires, not two, for optimal handling.

Winter tires should be used once the temperature hits 7 degrees C, or below.



THE REAL DEAL... CHOOSING YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE

Because evergreen trees keep their needles all year round, and are green even in the heart of winter, they are often used as symbols of life-everlasting – a representation of faith and resurrection, dating back to early times.

The ancient Romans marked the Winter Solstice (December 21) by celebrating Saturnalia - when they hung their homes and temples with evergreen boughs, and exchanged gifts.

By the 16th Century in Europe, "Paradise Trees" decorated with nuts, flowers and red apples, were often part of the Mystery Plays that were performed publicly - a visual representation of the Garden of Eden, for a largely illiterate populace. The tradition was particularly strong in Germany and Latvia, and associated with Christmas - since the Feast Day of Adam and Eve is December 24.

There is a story that Martin Luther - the father of the Protestant Reformation - created the first illuminated Christmas tree, to explain the beauty of the night sky and all creation. He brought in an evergreen and hung it with white candles - representing the stars in the night sky, and the light of faith, topping the tree with an angel or star.

Red for knowledge, green for life everlasting, white for purity have remained the traditional Christmas colours, and the Christmas tree continues to be a beloved tradition – but times are changing.

Artificial trees continue to "grow" in popularity. Shoppers can find not only the perfect shape and size, but also the perfect colour – and it needn't be green – for their home and decor.

Artificial trees can even come with energy-efficient LED lighting already embedded in the branches, or pre-decorated. No longer red, white and green, unless you want a retro look, today's trees might be decorated in burgundy and gold; blue and silver; even purple and rose.

Decorations are no longer limited to coloured balls and carved figurines. Unusual materials, silk flowers and leaves, birds, sprays of berries, feathers,fairies – anything goes.





But for the purist, there still nothing like a real tree – the colour, the scent, the tradition of choosing and trimming the perfect evergreen.

On the plus side, there's the fact that live trees are a renewable resource. While they grow, they absorb carbon and release oxygen, create wildlife habitat and shelter for birds, serve as windbreaks and prevent soil erosion. And once cut, they are replanted - as with any other crop, tree farmers say.

In the home, real trees add their scent to smells of the season – and after the holidays, the discarded trees can be used to create wildlife shelters, or chipped to make wood chips for pathways.

Choosing a real tree? First, decide where you plan to place it, and consider the height of the room. There's no point in buying a 10' tree for a room with an 8' ceiling; remember to factor in the height of your tree stand as well. And there's no point in hunting for a perfectly symmetrical tree, if it's going to be tucked into a corner.

If you plan to cut your own tree, there's no concern about freshness – but if you are purchasing a tree from a vendor, there are a few simple tests to ensure your tree is still fresh.

Take hold of a branch, about 6" from the end, and pull your hand toward you, allowing the branch to slip through your fingers. If some needles come off, that's fine – but if there is an absolute shower of needles, the tree has dried out, and will shed many more needles in your home.

Another test: Bend a needle. If it makes a "U" shape, without breaking, the tree is fresh.

Store your tree outside, in a cool place, until you're ready to bring it in and decorate. Then cut off the bottom few inches of the trunk, and set the tree firmly in a tree stand with good water-holding capacity – and water daily.

A live, potted tree is a great idea – if you don't mind being limited in size (a larger tree would be just too heavy, with the root ball still attached), and if you have the skill and the knowledge to care for the tree over the winter, until it's time to plant.

Live in a condo? Remember to check the rules, before buying a tree. Some condos don't allow live Christmas trees, due to shedding needles, fire hazards, and the difficulty of disposing of the tree after the holidays.



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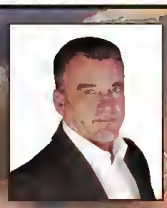


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ENGLISH TOFFEE

1 cup (2 sticks) salted butter
1 cup white sugar
1 Tbsp. light corn syrup
2 Tbsp. water
1/2 - 3/4 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips (depending on how much chocolate you like)
1/2 cup chopped toasted almonds or pecans

Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper or aluminum foil. In a heavy saucepan melt butter over medium heat. Stir in sugar, corn syrup, and water. Bring to a boil. Continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until thermometer reads 290 degrees F. (Watch it carefully once it reaches 280 degrees because the temperature will increase quickly, and you don't want this to burn). Pour onto cookie sheet and quickly spread to desired thickness. Allow to cool for 5 minutes.

Sprinkle chocolate chips over warm toffee. Let sit 1-2 minutes or until softened and gently spread melted chocolate into an even layer. Sprinkle with almonds and lightly press so the almonds stick. Chill in refrigerator until hard. Crack into pieces and store in an airtight container. Makes 1 1/2 pounds.

TIPS for making toffee:

1. Use good, name-brand butter. This recipe calls for salted butter, but if all you have is unsalted, add a pinch of salt at the end.
2. Calibrate your thermometer.
3. Use a wooden spoon.
4. Be careful. Be very careful. This stuff is hot - use oven mitts!
5. Use a heavy-duty saucepan. This reduces the chances of hot spots forming and burning your candy.
6. Line your cookie sheet with parchment or aluminum foil. It makes it easier to break the toffee in pieces. And there's less clean up.

VARIATIONS:

Extra nutty: Quickly stir in an additional 1/2 cup chopped or sliced almonds into toffee before pouring onto cookie sheet.

Salty/sweet: Sprinkle with 1 1/2 tsp. sea salt instead of almonds.

Adapted from The Idea Room
http://thetallgrlcooks.blogspot.ca/2010/12/english-toffee.html





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Out-of-the-Box Themes for Your Holiday Party



Parties are an integral part of the holiday season, when friends and family gather to celebrate and give thanks. For holiday hosts, parties are a great opportunity to make the season even more festive with an event that guests won't soon forget. The following are just a few themes to make your holiday party as memorable as it is merry.

• **Christmas sweater party:** Christmas sweater parties have grown in popularity over the last decade, when revelers have tried to outdo one another with the most outrageous holiday-themed sweater. Give prizes for the most outlandish sweater and let guests know early on so they can begin their hunt for a holiday sweater that's so ugly or outrageous you can't help but love it.

• **Christmas costume party:** Costume parties aren't just for Halloween. This holiday season, consider making your holiday bash a costume party, encouraging guests to dress up as their favorite characters from holiday tales like "Frosty the Snowman," "A Christmas Carol" or any of the host of beloved holiday legends.

• **Caribbean Christmas:** The weather come the holiday season may be the one thing to put a damper on the festivities. To combat blue feelings from potentially inclement weather, consider a Caribbean theme for your holiday party this season. Rather than wearing sweaters and long pants, wear beach attire and give the party a touch of the Caribbean. Outfit your home in beach decor and serve food and drinks reminiscent of the Caribbean instead of more traditional holiday fare like eggnog and gingerbread cookies.

• **Film festival:** Holiday movies are another tradition of the season, so why not invite friends and family over for a holiday film marathon? Include classics like "It's a Wonderful Life" and "A Christmas Story" and encourage guests to submit their own favorites for consideration.

• **Christmas karaoke:** For those who love to belt out their favorite holiday tunes, consider throwing a Christmas karaoke party that allows guests to perform their own renditions of their favorite Christmas carols. Purchase a home karaoke set and ask guests in advance of the party if there are any particular songs they'd like to perform.

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Dreaming of a Green Christmas



Green is a Christmas colour.

It's also a way of life, that can be easily incorporated into holiday gift-giving!

. Wrapping paper and ribbons look lovely, but all too often end up in the trash. Instead, think about presenting your gifts in a gift bag or basket – giving a gift of fair trade coffee or tea in a mug or beverage bottle – wrapping home-made goodies in a brand-new tea towel. Or reuse and recycle: wrap gifts in the comic section of the newspaper, use fabric scraps, or children's artwork. And when it comes to those finishing touches on the package, try using pine cones, berries or pine branches for decoration.

• Giving a gift that requires batteries? Why not make rechargeable batteries and a battery charger part of the gift?

• Fight plastic water bottles – give a reusable hydration bottle as a gift or stocking stuffer.

• Give home-made! Home-made soaps, jams, preserves and pickles, natural candles, baked goodies and treats packed in a reusable tin. It will be appreciated, and provide a greener Christmas.

Greenest of all: Instead of another consumer item, why not give a gift through a donation to an organization like World Vision or Oxfam – giving to provide a family with a goat, a flock of chickens, soccer balls for kids, or to supply a classroom in a Third World country. The non-governmental organizations will send a card, describing the gift, made in the recipient's name, and the difference it can make.

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Wishing You Every Happiness This Holiday Season

May your home be blessed with happiness, your business with good fortune, and your family with good health this holiday season.
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Planning your winter road trip

Heading home for the holidays? Planning to do some travelling? Visiting with friends and family?

Before you head out on Ontario's wintry roads, be prepared.

Having your vehicle winterized before you drive off into a winter wonderland could avoid problems down the road. Car Care Canada offers the following recommendations:

Clean, flush and put new antifreeze into the cooling system. Engine coolant should be flushed and refilled every 2 years, in most vehicles. Don't add pure antifreeze; it actually has a lower freezing point when mixed with water. Experts recommend a 50:50 water:coolant mix, to keep the coolant from freezing, lubricate the water pump and prevent corrosion of the system.

Make sure your heaters, defrosters and wipers are all working properly. Replace worn and damaged wiper blades that streak, or don't properly clean the windshield. When replacing the blades, remember to top up the windshield washer reservoir, and make sure the nozzles are cleaned and adjusted.

Check the battery and charging system. Cold weather can be brutal on batteries. A few precautions can ensure that you don't end up stuck, in the cold and in the dark, let down by a dead battery. If your battery is more than 3 years old, consider replacing it.

Check tire tread and pressure. Bald tires are a danger in snow and ice. Don't forget to check your spare as well.

Change your oil regularly, every 5,000 to 8,000 km. Switch to winter weight oil if you live in a cold climate – like Canada. And while you're getting winter-ready, have your automotive service technician also check fuel, air and transmission filters.

Always keep your gas tank at least half-full. This limits condensation in your tank, and reduces gas-line freezing. A little gas line antifreeze added every other fill-up can also help.

Due for a tune-up? Definitely have it done before winter. Winter weather can magnify existing problems, such as hard starts or rough idling. A tune-up will improve the efficiency and reliability of the engine and emissions system.

Check the brakes – one of the most important safety features of your vehicle, especially when driving on snow and ice.

Check the exhaust system for leaks. Carbon monoxide is a danger – and can build up, with a leaky system, especially when windows are closed, or you are stuck in a snowdrift.

Always carry an emergency kit, when heading out on winter roads. Kits should include ice scrapers, snow brush, jumper cables, flashlights and batteries, flares, a blanket, extra clothes and socks, candles, matches in a waterproof container, bottle water, dry food snacks, and a supply of any necessary medications.



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Peanut and Pear Muesli Jump Starts the Day

Diabetes Friendly Food:

(NC)—This delightful muesli is a tasty breakfast or snack option for those who live with diabetes, and also offers beneficial fibre, calcium, iron and folate. The peanut butter, oats and yogurt in this recipe provide the nutrition kick, and the cinnamon and ginger will delight the tastebuds. More tasty recipes can be found at www.peanutbureau.ca.

Overnight Peanut and Pear Muesli
Makes 4 servings

½ cup (125 mL) dry large flake oats
2 tbsp (30 mL) wheat germ
2 cups (500 mL) plain, non-fat yogurt
3 tbsp (45 mL) smooth peanut butter
½ tsp (2 mL) ground cinnamon
¼ tsp (1 mL) ground ginger
1 red pear, diced
3 tbsp (45 mL) unsalted dry-roasted peanuts, chopped
2 tbsp (30 mL) dried cranberries

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Spread the oats and wheat germ on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Toast for 5 to 7 minutes or until fragrant. Cool to room temperature. Oat mixture can be toasted ahead and stored in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

2. Stir the yogurt with the peanut butter until well combined. Stir in oat mixture, cinnamon, ginger and pear until well combined. Divide equally between 4 bowls and wrap tightly (or transfer to airtight portable containers). Reserve in the refrigerator overnight or up to 2 days.

3. Sprinkle with peanuts and cranberries just before serving.

Per serving (¼ recipe): 255 calories, 11 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 3 mg cholesterol, 118 mg sodium, 29 g carbohydrates, 4 g fibre, 11 g sugars, 14 g protein. High source of fibre. Good source of calcium and iron. Source of folate.

TIPS for making toffee:
• Replace the oats with one or a combination of grains such as spelt, rye or quinoa flakes that are available at most bulk and health food stores.
• If you prefer a sweetened yogurt, you can add honey to taste. Note that every 1 tsp (5 mL) of honey you add, will add 6 g of sugar per serving.

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Give your Christmas a country feel

Christmas decorations can range from grandiose lighting displays to more subtle adornments. Some families may prefer more traditional holiday decor, while others might like the look of modern trimmings.

Holiday decorations can also be used to create an atmosphere reminiscent of a certain type of locale, giving a home a holiday in the city vibe or a more rustic feel. For those who prefer a rustic look reminiscent of a country Christmas, consider the following tips.

* Start with the tree. The Christmas tree is the center of many a home's holiday decor. Instead of traditional holiday lights, choose lights that look like candles, and adorn the tree with wooden or hand-made ornaments and strands of popcorn.

* Forgo traditional wrapping paper. Instead of flashy, store-bought wrapping paper, wrap presents in brown paper and put presents under the tree as early as possible. Instead of store-bought gift tags, create your own and attach a candy cane or another candy to the gift.

* Think "nature" when it comes to decorations. Items gathered from nature can give a home a rustic appeal during the holidays. Hang a homemade wreath on the front door and include pine cones and clippings from evergreen trees when adding decorative accents around the house. Tuck a few decorative woven baskets in corners to further emphasize a rustic look.

* Create homemade ornaments. Spend an afternoon creating holiday crafts with the kids, and use these instead of store-bought ornaments on your tree and when decorating. For those who are especially gifted craftsmen, put your woodworking skills to the test to create decorative wooden stockings that, if not functional, can be replaced with more traditional stockings come Christmas Eve.

* Don't forget the music. Another way to create a country Christmas is to play country Christmas albums instead of classical or more traditional Christmas records. Nearly every country music star of the past and present has recorded a Christmas song or album, so create a master playlist of country Christmas songs on your digital music player and play it throughout the season to set the holiday mood in your household.



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A PERFECT PARTY... A MATTER OF LOGISTICS

Planning to entertain this holiday season? Planning ahead can mean that you have more time to enjoy your own party - and your guests.

• Remove some of your chairs, to open up the space and allow people to stand and mingle.

• Serving drinks? Remember to have non-alcoholic options available, like mocktails, and plenty of food stations with an array of nibbles. It's always best to have someone serving the alcoholic beverages, rather than allowing guests to "pour their own." Remember that hosts are responsible, should their guests overindulge, and then attempt to drive home. Always have options – from cab fares, to spare bed available, or in a pinch, a driver to take guests home.

• Candles look lovely, but they can be a fire hazard. Consider using artificial candles or luminaries – in wonderful, decorative, festive holders.

• Holding a cocktail-style party, with hors d'oeuvres and canapés? Just how many goodies should you prepare? The experts recommend serving 4 to 6 canapes per person, per hour. For a 3-hour party, 12 to 18 canapes per person should be fine. That's not 18 different hors d'oeuvres; just sufficient volume to make sure that all your guests have enough nibbles.

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Family Fun for the Holidays

Staying home with the kids for the Holidays? Don't forget to spend time together as a family – without the iPads, computers and video games . Here are some family-oriented activities that could easily become treasured family traditions.

• Go sledding! Bundle everyone up, and head to the nearest hill for an afternoon of sledding and sliding. Just make sure that the hill offers a safe, straight run – and doesn't end up in a roadway, ditch or powerline tower. And afterwards, head home for hot chocolate, with marshmallows – or bring along a thermos and cookies!

• Go skating! Whether it's an indoor rink, or outdoor rink, skating offers great exercise and fun for the whole family.

• Want to take a winter hike? Consider buying or renting snowshoes. Snowshoeing can be done almost everywhere there's snow – on trails, or just in your local park. If you keep the snowshoes in the trunk of your car, you'll be ready, whenever the conditions are right.

• If there's enough snow, make a snowman – or a whole family of snowmen, snow women and snow children – and dress them up. If there's only a little snow, make snow angels.

Not really one for the great outdoors? There are plenty of ideas for family fun, that don't involve sports equipment and windchill factors.

• Have a family games night. Add to the cosiness by wearing your favourite toques, and enjoying a cup of hot chocolate while you play.

• Make festive treats, as a family. Spend some time in the kitchen, creating Buttercrunch toffee, candy apples, festive cookies or other goodies to share - and eat.

• Start a new old-fashioned tradition. Get together and read a favourite book out loud – like Alice in Wonderland, or Dickens' A Christmas Carol – or even Dr. Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas. Or pick up a DVD of a classic movie, and make it part of your evening. No one ever tires of Alastair Sim in A Christmas Carol, or James Stewart in It's a Wonderful Life – or The Nightmare before Christmas!

• Revive a Boxing Day tradition. In Victorian England, wealthy families would share the largesse of Christmas by boxing up leftovers and delivering them to the poor. No-one wants your "left-overs" - but why not hunt through the cupboards and closets, cull your wardrobe, and donate to the local Food Bank and Salvation Army or clothing room?







Home Made... Wonders of Wood

Think back to a simpler time, and the toys you loved. Chances are, those toys will still make a big hit, even in these days of electronics, hand-held devices, DVDs and downloads.

Play is an important part of early child development - and toys should challenge the development of motor skills, and fuel interaction, creativity and imagination!

Wooden toys - pull toys, trucks, stacking toys, blocks - can be a wonderful choice, as long as they are appropriate to the child's age and developmental needs, according to www.craftsmanspace.com, a site that promotes wooden toys and offers free designs.

"The toy is considered to be good if it challenges the child to think, play with it, experiment, feel, ask him or herself questions, and seek answers... A good toy should be nice, amusing, safe and high quality and it should help the child to learn and meet the world around him or her."

The toy should be sturdy enough that it won't fall apart, when subjected to rough play, and should avoid sharp edges.

For children under the age of three, who explore their world by putting everything in their mouths, make sure there are no small or detachable parts that could pose a choking hazard.

- Toys should only contain safe materials - no toxic chemicals, glues or paints.
- Toys designed for sitting or riding should be stable, and not tip.
- Toys should be designed to be easily washed or cleaned.
- Toys shouldn't be too loud, if designed to make noise: small children have hearing that can be damaged by loud noises.

When choosing wood for toys, be selective. Avoid exotic woods and walnut, that might spark an allergic reaction. Best woods are maple, alder, birch, sycamore, poplar, cherry and the like; clear pine is easy to work with. Always sand surfaces, to avoid splinters.

The simplest of all wooden toys are blocks. With something as simple as pieces of wood, kids can create castles, or whole cities, towers, and super highways for their toy cars. As a first project, blocks made a great gift:

You'll need 1" by 2" stock, and 1" dowelling for columns. Tools include a measuring rule, pencil, carpenter's square, saber saw or Mitrebox and back saw, coping saw, vise, medium grit and fine grit sandpaper.

Cut the 1" by 2" into 1.5" blocks, for square blocks.

For long blocks, cut the 1" by 2" into 3.5" lengths; cut in half on the diagonal, these can make triangular blocks.

Cut the dowelling into sections, to make columns.

Use the rule to measure the lengths on the wood, and the pencil to mark the position. Use the carpenter's square to make sure the ends are straight. Mark and cut one block at a time, using a vise to hold the wood in place while you cut, using the saber saw or mitrebox.

Remember to sand every finished piece well - no splinters or sharp edges! Paint using non-toxic paints, or stain using food-grade coloring.

The trick to having fun with blocks is VOLUME. Make enough blocks for a city!





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Low-Cost Gift Idea for Children

According to child development experts, play is important.

Play can aid in the development of fine and gross motor skills, interaction and co-operation, abstract thinking and language development. In particular, role-playing can help kids build confidence, and comfort in social settings. Encouraging children to role play becomes even easier when parents offer a holiday gift that inspires dress-up and imagination. The bonus? It doesn't have to cost a fortune, either.

Chances are old Halloween costumes are tucked away somewhere in the house - or there may be old, outgrown and unstylish clothing hanging in the closet. This can be a treasure trove of dress-up parts, perfect for creating a costume trunk for boys and girls.

The first step is finding a container that can house the clothing and accessories. A toy chest with flip-up lid is ideal, but there are other options - like a plastic storage bin or box.

Depending on the child's interests, the container can be painted or decorated with the youngster's name and whimsical images that inspire imagination. Think about fairy castles or pirate treasures. If a boy loves toys and trucks, paint a road and vehicles on the chest.

The next step is to load the container with the costumes and any other clothing that will make good dress-up wear. Additional items can be supplemented and often bought on discount after Halloween. Don't overlook 99 cents stores and other discount outlets for more items, such as plastic crowns or firefighter hats, and fake jewels. Ask friends and family if they have any previously-used costumes that are no longer needed that can be added to the costume chest. Face paints and makeup can complete the assortment of dress-up components.

Wrap up the costume container and offer it during the holidays. In addition to the wonder of opening such a large present, children can be entertained for hours, playing with all of the items tucked inside. They can also rediscover the costumes of their trick-or-treating pasts. Encourage young ones to put on shows to further show off their dressing up.





Proper Etiquette for Gift-Giving

The rules of etiquette have loosened a bit from centuries past. No longer are people held accountable for the slightest misstep. Even so, when it comes to holiday gifting, erring on the side of caution and following proper etiquette can make exchanging gifts go more smoothly.

Being considerate when gifting helps make the holidays enjoyable and as stress-free as possible. Some may find it unfortunate that so much pressure is placed on giving gifts this time of year. When exchanging, heed these suggestions.

• Gift-giving is about the recipient and not you as the giver. The idea is to create that warm and fuzzy feeling for the person on the receiving end. Think about the person's interests and find a gift that pertains to these interests. It may not be the easiest to find a rare book or those collectible golf clubs, but putting forth the effort will mean more to the person getting the gift.

• Don't up the ante. When exchanging gifts with a person, do not try to anticipate what he or she will spend and then go above that price. This may come off as petty and make the other person feel uncomfortable. Instead, choose a price that you can readily afford and find the nicest thing within that range. If a person with whom you hadn't anticipated exchanging gifts gives you something, simply offer thanks and don't feel uncomfortable that you do not have something to offer in return.

• Gift receipts are very thoughtful. Including a gift receipt with your gift tells the recipient that you tried to find something that he or she will enjoy, but that you're comfortable with them returning the gift if it's not just right. Again, this conveys your feelings for the recipient. Do not, however, use gift receipts as a "get out of jail free" pass. That means, don't simply grab anything off the rack, attach a gift receipt and attempt to pass it off as a meaningful gift.

• Do not e-mail thank you notes. If you are not able to thank a person in person for a gift, it is in better taste to send a hand-written note than to fire off a quick e-mail. While writing letters has become a lost art, a hand-written thank you note stands out and shows how much you appreciate the gift.

• It's unnecessary to give your boss a gift. Gifting your boss may come across like you are trying to win favor. It also may create a competition within the office. Stick to gifting colleagues, but leave the boss out of the holiday pool.

• Gift cards do not break etiquette rules. Although gift cards may seem like the easy way out of gifting, they've become more acceptable and popular. If you want to personalize a gift card, try using a photo or special memory that correlates to the gift card. Otherwise, package the gift card with a few inexpensive items to create a gift basket.

• When in doubt, stick with non-intimate gifts. Perfume, cologne, intimate apparel and similar items say that you know a person on a deeper level and are extremely personal. For friends and acquaintances, stick with safer gifts that do not give off intimate undertones.

• Don't regift. Whenever possible, graciously accept gifts and do not try to pass them off as your own to other people. If caught, you will be more embarrassed than if you had not given a gift at all.

Following a few guidelines on gift-giving etiquette can help to make the holidays even happier.



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Cranberry-White Chocolate Shortbread

Preheat over to 350F degrees

In a large bowl, beat together until light and fluffy:
2 cups, softened butter
1 cup fruit sugar

Add **4 cups all-purpose flour** and mix well

Stir in:
6 ounces Callebaut white chocolate chunks
1 ½ cups cranberries

Drop rounded tablespoons of dough, 2 inches apart, onto ungreased baking sheets (or use Parchment paper) Flatten each ball slightly. Bake 10 to 14 minutes or until lightly browned. Cool 5 minutes on the baking sheets. Remove to wire racks; cool completely and store in air tight containers.

Freeze well for up to 1 month

Submitted by Nancy Young



Fast 'N' Fabulous Fruit Cake

Makes 2 loves. Moist and delicious.

<u>Stir Together</u>
2 cups all purpose flour
1 tsp baking soda and set aside

<u>Combine</u>
2 eggs, slightly beaten
1 ½ cps mincemeat
1 can Eagle Brand milk
2 cups chopped glazed fruit (or just glazed cherries)
1 cup chopped walnuts (or nut of your choice)

Add dry ingredients: mix well
Divide batter between prepared pans.

Bake in preheated oven – 300 degrees for 1 hour and 20 minutes or until done – this will be soft but tester should come out clean. Cool 15 minutes. Turn out of pans and cool completely. Garnish with glazed cherries if desired.

Submitted by Nancy Young

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Struffoli – Italian Honey Balls

For the Dough
4 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon sugar
Zest of half a lemon, grated
Zest of half an orange, grated
pinch salt
4 large eggs
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 teaspoon grappa, rum, or vanilla
3 cups vegetable oil for frying

For the Honey Syrup
2 cups honey
½ cup sugar
⅓ cup water
¼ cup small colored sprinkles

Stir the flour, sugar, lemon and orange zest and salt together in a bowl and turn it out onto a clean work surface. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and add the eggs, butter and grappa to it. With your fingertips, work the eggs, butter and grappa together until more or less blended, then begin working in the dry ingredients. Continue working the dough until it is smooth and evenly blended. Gather the dough together into a ball, wipe the dough from your hands and add it to the dough ball. Clean your hands and the work surface, flour both lightly and knead the dough until smooth, 3 to 4 minutes. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and let stand at room temperature 1 hour.

Pull off a plum size piece of the dough and roll it out with your palms and fingers to a rope about 1/3 inch in diameter. Repeat with the remaining dough. Cut the dough ropes crosswise into 1/3-inch lengths. Roll the pieces of dough between your hands into balls.

Pour the oil into a wide, deep skillet or braising pan and heat over medium heat until a deep frying thermometer registers 350 degrees F or a dough ball gives off a lively sizzle when slipped into the oil. Carefully slide about one-fourth of the dough balls into the oil and fry, turning and immersing them with a wire skimmer or slotted spoon, until golden brown on all sides, about 4 minutes. Transfer them with the skimmer to a paper towel-lined baking sheet to drain, first allowing any excess oil to drip back into the pan. Repeat with the remaining dough balls, allowing the oil to return to the correct temperature before frying the next batch.

Have a bowl of cold water and a serving plate large enough to hold the finished struffoli (about 12 inches in diameter) close by. Stir the honey, sugar and water together in a heavy wide pot large enough to hold all the dough balls over low heat until the sugar is dissolved. Increase the heat to high and bring the syrup to a boil. The syrup will foam up dramatically when it comes to a boil. Continue cooking until the foam dies down and the mixture becomes just a shade darker, about 4 minutes. Remove from the heat and immediately add all the fried dough balls. Toss them in the syrup with a wire skimmer until they are coated. Remove the dough balls from the syrup with the skimmer, allowing excess syrup to drip back into the pan first, and mound them on the serving plate like a pyramid, helping yourself with your hands from time to time, after dipping them into the cold water to protect them.

Scatter the sprinkles over the mound of struffoli until it is colorful. You may serve them the same day, however it also keeps well for several days covered loosely with plastic wrap.





Wreathed in Smiles

Love wreaths? Then why limit them to a front door decoration?

• Use a favourite and dramatic wreath as the centrepiece on your table.

• Place wreaths on your indoor doors, especially when entertaining. Wreaths can be used to help guests find the powder room, or just to make the interior more festive.

• Use wreaths as accent pieces on a mantle (just make sure the wreath isn't flammable, if it's a working fireplace), or on a staircase, in combination with evergreen swags.

• Using colours other than red, green and white will extend the usefulness of the wreaths, beyond just Christmas. Add gold and silver, glitter and pearls to create a centrepiece for the New Year.



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THE PERFECT CHEESE PLATTER

NC - A creative cheese plate is a crowd-pleaser during the holidays.

Better still, it's simple to prepare, and doesn't take up any room in your oven.

Start with the platter. A party plate is fine, but why not be creative? You can also use a well-cleaned wooden board, slab of marble or piece of slate as the backdrop for your cheeses.

Choose a variety of cheese, including a soft-ripened cheese or "bloomy rinds", as they are also known. Add a semi-soft cheese, like Gouda or Havarti - and hard/firm cheeses, like cheddar, Jarlesberg or pecorino.

For added tang, consider a goat's milk cheese, blue cheese, and a "washed rind" cheese.

"Washed rind" is a reference to a process that washes the cheese in saltwater or brine - and then brushes it with alcohol, ranging from Chardonnay to Champagne.

Once you've made your choices, get the quantities right. For a party platter, appetizer or dessert cheese tray, serve a small crowd 3 to 5 types, and a larger crowd 5 to 10 types. Calculate approximately 30g to 40 g of cheese per person.

For more variety, enhance some of the choices with toppings like red pepper jelly, pesto, or peach slices.

Don't forget the accompaniments. In addition to an array of crackers and fresh bread, fruits like fig, pear and apple work well. Dried fruits, fruit compotes, and pickled vegetables can round out the platter.

Serve with care. Prepare the platter in advance, lay out the appropriate knives, and let your cheese sit at room temperature for at least one hour, before the guests arrive.

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